



Session update from Olympia

March 27, 2011

Senator Brown Discusses Legislative Progress this Session



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Budget Keeps Transportation Projects on Schedule

The nearly \$9 billion, bipartisan transportation budget proposed this week by the Senate marks the first time in history that the state will collect less transportation revenue than in the previous biennium.

With state gas tax revenue declining steadily, one of our few options is to find operating efficiencies. In addition to nearly \$28 million in reductions in administrative costs at the Department of Transportation and at the Department of Licensing, the budget relies on reforms in a number of bills currently before the Legislature:

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Work on the remaining projects funded by the “Nickel” tax of 2003 and the Transportation Partnership Act of 2005 will proceed as scheduled but requires a diversion of funds from other core transportation programs to make up for our lost gas tax revenues. It’s important to remember that these projects are not only essential to maintaining safe travel flow for motorists and commercial freight but that the projects support an average of 10,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs each year over a 10-year period.

In that sense, this budget is not only an investment in our state’s transportation system, it’s also a way to create hundreds of living-wage jobs for Washington families. This budget is the most significant jobs package we’re going to be passing this session, and it will send money and jobs to every corner of the state.

You can [see the full budget proposal here](#).

Locally, I worked closely with my seatmate Representative Andy Billig, who is Vice Chair of the House Transportation Committee, to ensure key projects received funding. Highlights in the 3rd District and Spokane Region include:

- Continued funding for the North-South Corridor,
- Funding to complete an interchange on Highway 195 to greatly enhance safety at a site where several tragic accidents occurred,
- And the funding of many other Spokane Region projects that can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

The Senate budget included the funding of **24 Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Program projects, 29 Safe Routes to Schools Program projects, and 16 Regional Mobility Grants**. The projects in Spokane County are:

Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Program

North Division Street (US-2) - \$233,535.00
Browne Street/Division Street Couplet, \$423,000.00
Comprehensive Education Project, \$176,510.00
Monroe Street, \$91,000.00
Nevada Street, \$109,960.00

Safe Routes to Schools Program

Northwood Middle School & Farwell Elementary School Safety Project, \$435,115.00
Sunset Elementary Safe Routes Grant 2010, \$324,565.00

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TRY YOUR HAND AT BALANCING THE BUDGET

Budget solutions are like opinions — everyone has one. Well, here’s your chance to try out your ideas by clicking on our [budget calculator](#). You not only can choose which public services you’d cut, and by how much, but you can also see just much or how little savings those reductions provide — and how close they get you to balancing the budget.



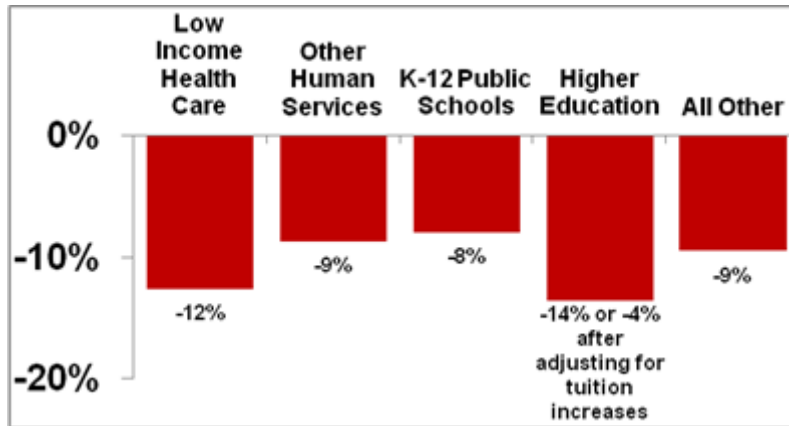
In last week's session update I announced that the state Economic & Revenue Forecast Council had released its new revenue forecast for the 2009/11 and 2011/13 biennia and the projections of another \$778 million shortfall. While our state is not alone in our budget challenges (see graph to the left), Washington is among the hardest-hit states because of our state revenue stream's reliance on consumer spending. I wanted to share some additional

We could cut our entire public system of higher education -- all six of our public four-year institutions and all 34 of our two-year community and technical colleges -- and we'd solve 50 percent of the current problem.

We could eliminate all state environmental efforts -- all programs that promote clean air and water, clean up pollution, preserve and support our vast natural resources, protect endangered species and encourage conservation -- and we'd solve less than 10 percent of the current problem.

The chart below shows the Governor's proposed cuts.

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Some people make the argument that the State has a spending problem. We hear loud talk about making Washington live within its means by cutting state spending to match diminished revenues. We want to be among the top quarter of states in public services, but we're in the lower-half in amount paid in state and local taxes. The fact is that growth in spending is [at its lowest level in 30 years](#), and [actual spending is at its lowest level since the 2003-2005 biennia](#). In my early January [blog post](#) I wrote ...*the truth is, [state spending compared to personal income has been declining for a decade](#). And all this talk about "living within our means" masks another important truth: We can't keep cutting spending without downgrading the public services...And if we keep downgrading these same services, we can't expect to maintain our quality of life, much less improve it.* We need to align our revenues with our expectations about our quality of life.

Very soon the House and Senate budgets will be brought forward, and I look forward to continuing our discussion on this all important topic at that point.

Sincerely,

Click [here](#) for contact information for my Olympia or Spokane office.